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THE FUTURE OF THE FRENCH TERRITORY OF
THE AFARS AND THE ISSAS (FTAI)

Study Pursuant to NSSM 239

Prepared and approved by the ad hoc Interdepartmental Group
under the Chairmanship of the Assistant Secretary of State for
African Affairs.

May 27, 1976

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-i-

TABLE OF CONTENTS

NSSM 239	-ii-
MAP OF HORN OF AFRICA	-iv-
I. PURPOSE	-1-
II. UNITED STATES INTERESTS IN THE HORN OF AFRICA	-1-
A. US Interests	-1-
B. Effects of FTAI Independence on US Interests	-3-
III. KEY ISSUES POSED BY THE FTAI'S FORTHCOMING INDEPENDENCE	-7-
IV. INTERNAL POLITICAL SITUATION IN THE FTAI	-9-
V. INTERESTS AND INTENTIONS OF FRANCE AND NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES	-15-
A. France	-15-
B. Somalia	-20-
C. Ethiopia	-25-
VI. INTERESTS AND INTENTIONS OF OTHER STATES AND ENTITIES	-29-
A. The USSR and Cuba	-29-
B. Peoples Republic of China	-35-
C. Regional Relations: Arabs, Israelis, and Africans	-36-
D. Possible UN Action	-39-
VII. SCENARIOS FOR FTAI INDEPENDENCE	-40-
VIII. GOALS AND OPTIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES	-48-
A. American Involvement in the Overall Problem	-54-
B. Coordination with the French	-56-
C. Approaches to the Soviets	-59-
D. Pressure on the Ethiopians	-60-
E. Enlistment of Moderate Arab Assistance	-63-
F. Encouragement of the OAU and the UN	-65-
TAB 1 ETHIOPIA: SECURITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM	-68-
TAB 2 ETHIOPIA, SOMALIA AND FTAI: COMPARATIVE MILITARY STRENGTHS AND MAJOR EQUIPMENT, MARCH 1976	-69-

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I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to examine the consequences of the French decision to grant independence to the French Territory of the Afars and Issas (FTAI) and to evaluate US goals with regard to the FTAI and the Horn of Africa and alternative policy options for achieving these goals. This study will take into account: a) US interests in the Horn; b) the key issues posed by the French decision to grant independence to the FTAI; c) the internal political situation in the FTAI; d) the interests and intentions of France and the neighboring countries regarding the FTAI; e) the attitudes and interest of various other states and international entities, including the USSR, Cuba, the People's Republic of China, the Organization of African Unity, the Arab League, and the UN; and f) various possible scenarios for the achievement of independence by the FTAI.

II. UNITED STATES INTEREST IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

A. US Interests

United States interests in the Horn are primarily strategic, and were previously set forth in NSSM Study 184.

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The area's proximity to the Middle East oil fields, the Indian Ocean oil route, and the Red Sea passage to the Mediterranean have increased its regional significance in recent years, at the same time that the deterioration and eventual demise of Haile Selassie's regime have diminished Ethiopia's stature as a leader in African affairs and consequently its value to us as a continental influence. The Naval Communications Station we have maintained since 1942 at Kagnaw, although greatly reduced in size over the last few years, is still an element in our communications link with US Navy ships operating in the Northern Indian Ocean and serves other governmental communications purposes as well.

Our access to Ethiopian ports and airfields has in the past greatly facilitated the operations of our Navy and military air cargo operations in the area, and is an asset worth preserving. We do not, however, overestimate our ability to use Ethiopian real estate in times of crisis. It is likely that at such times, or in the case of hostilities in the Middle East, the Ethiopian regime, in order not to get drawn in, would restrict our use of its ports and airfields to furnish support to one or more of the combatants. However, our access to these facilities contributes to our ability to play an active

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regional role in normal times or in pre-crisis maneuverings and serves to prevent their use by unfriendly forces.

The more general United States interest in freedom of navigation through international straits is of particular relevance in the Horn in view of the presence of unfriendly forces in the area. Located on either side of the Strait of Bab el Mandeb, Somalia and South Yemen are closely associated with the Soviet Union which has important naval and air support facilities including a cruise missile support facility in Berbera, Somalia.

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The US interests in the Horn listed above have led us to pursue policies in recent years which would: a) establish a cooperative relationship with the Ethiopian Government, particularly the new Provisional Military Government (PMG) which assumed power in September 1974; and b) enhance stability in the region. These goals provide the rationale for many of our actions in the Horn, most specifically our important security assistance program to Ethiopia (see Tab 1).

B. Effects of FTAI Independence on US Interests

Our goal of stability in the Horn will be the first to be affected by the coming independence of the FTAI.

Depending upon the conditions under which independence is achieved, and specifically whether it is accompanied by a departure of the French forces now in the FTAI, this event could bring about anything from guerrilla skirmishing in the territory to all-out war between Ethiopia and neighboring Soviet-armed Somalia. Somalia has long claimed the territory, which is largely populated by Issa tribesmen who are ethnic Somalis, just as it has established irredentist claims to parts of Kenya and Ethiopia. The Somali Government has recently said that it would respect a "truly independent" FTAI; however, it will only recognize a pro-Somali government. At present the territory's local government is headed by Ali Aref, who has been inclined to cooperate with Addis. He is a member of the Afar tribe, which occupies large parts of Ethiopia and provides 40% of the FTAI's population. Ethiopia depends upon the FTAI's capital and deep-water port of Djibouti to ship half of its exports and would fight to prevent Somali control or domination of it.

Somalia's President Siad Barre has already said that thousands of guerrillas are prepared to enter the FTAI to fight for "true independence." A recent Special National

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Intelligence Estimate (SNIE)* has concluded: a) that the odds are no better than even that the French will maintain their military forces in the FTAI after independence; and b) that an open military conflict between Somalia and Ethiopia is likely to erupt soon after they leave.

The effect of the territory's independence on the US relationship with Ethiopia, our other principal concern in the area, is more difficult to predict. Involvement of Ethiopia in open warfare, pre-war maneuvering, preemptive action, or counter guerrilla activity in support of a friendly FTAI government would likely trigger an urgent request for increased or accelerated shipments of military equipment from us, its traditional supplier. The degree and speed of our response would improve or degrade our bilateral relationship. Failure to comply with Ethiopian requests for assistance would jeopardize US use of Kagnew Station and access to ports and airfields and would strengthen the position of some Ethiopian leaders who are opposed to continued association with the US. It is conceivable that in case of an unsatisfactory US response the Ethiopians would attempt to deal directly

*SNIE 76-1-76 March 1976: Prospects for and Implications of Conflict in the Horn of Africa Over the Next Year or so. This NSSM study draws heavily on this SNIE and quotes directly from it in many instances with only the changes necessary to bring it up to date.

with the USSR, as Somalia's patron and armorer, offering inter alia such rights and access as we now have in exchange for Soviet action on Djibouti favorable to Ethiopia, i.e., restraint of Somalia. However, reported Ethiopian soundings to Moscow about arms assistance have so far been rebuffed by the USSR.

With the departure of the French, freedom of navigation through the Strait of Bab el Mandeb, particularly in times of crisis, could be further affected if Somalia were to win control of Djibouti or if the PMG moved toward cooperation with the USSR. This would give Soviet client states control of the entrance on both sides of the Strait, which they would be likely to use in their favor in times of crisis or war.

The FTAI's independence will also affect US and Western interests outside of the Horn proper. US naval ships and military aircraft make occasional use of French facilities in Djibouti, primarily for refueling, as have our P-3 reconnaissance flights. If and when the French withdraw militarily from an independent FTAI, this useful access is likely to be denied to us, particularly if pro-Somali elements gain control. This loss, in addition to

the impending UK withdrawal from Masirah Island and Sallalah in Oman, could therefore have an effect on the ability of US and other Western forces, including the sizable fleet which the French have maintained in the Indian Ocean, to operate in the area.

III. Key Issues Posed by the FTAI's Forthcoming Independence

The French decision to grant independence to the FTAI raises certain key issues which will have to be considered in evaluating the various courses of action open to the US. Among these issues are the following:

1. Can the US remain passive regarding the evolution toward independence of the FTAI without affecting its credibility among African moderates?

2. What are France's goals for the FTAI following independence? Can the US cooperate with Paris where our goals are consistent with one another to promote their achievement?

3. How can the Soviets be induced to play a moderating role in the Horn that would support or, at the least, be consistent with US interests in the area?

4. Given the possible constraints that are likely to be imposed, can Somalia be pressured and/or induced to accept a genuinely independent FTAI, subservient neither to Ethiopia or Somalia?

5. What can the US do to prevent Ethiopia or Somalia from intervening preemptorily in FTAI?

6. Would an increase in Soviet influence in the Horn of Africa undermine US influence in the Middle East and the Arabian peninsula?

7. What effect will the new independent status of Djibouti, and whatever arrangements are made for French forces to remain or leave, have on US naval forces in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean?

8. Can the US afford to remain idle, as it ultimately did in Angola, if Cuba should take an active role on the side of Somalia?

9. Will the transition to independence occur under such circumstances as to put into question the desirability of early US recognition and establishment of diplomatic relations?

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[Omitted here are Sections IV-VII.]

VIII. GOALS AND OPTIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

The goal of the United States during the transition period leading to FTAI independence is to have this process evolve in such a way as to impinge as little as possible on the US interests in the area listed in Part II. These interests are briefly a cooperative relationship with Ethiopia, stability in the Horn of Africa, prevention of unfriendly forces' expanding their influence in the area, and the maintenance of free passage through the Strait of Bab el Mandeb. These interests would benefit mostly from an independent FTAI with a continued French military presence, a broadly supported government, credible international guarantees, and effective restraining influences on Somalia by moderate Arab states and the USSR.

Although the United States has important interests in the area, it is not directly involved in the FTAI's progress toward independence. The main factor is France whose skill and determination in seeking optimal conditions for the transition will largely determine its outcome.

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The French Government is showing increasing awareness of the elements required to improve the possibility that the FTAI's independence will come about peacefully. It has strengthened its forces in Djibouti; it has started consultation with Arab and African nations with a view to eventual guarantees of the FTAI's integrity and independence; it has raised the subject with the Soviets; and it is looking into the means of obtaining a more broadly supported government to which to turn over control at independence time. But whether all its efforts can succeed in preventing the FTAI's independence from bringing war to the Horn of Africa remains highly doubtful.

United States diplomatic actions to support the French effort can take essentially two forms: a) guidance and encouragement for France's efforts and b) use of our influence with some of the other actors to bring about favorable and cooperative reactions to French initiatives.

The ability of the United States to influence French actions is enhanced by the perceived commonality of interests which exist between the two countries in Africa, particularly our mutual interest in supporting moderate regimes. Closer cooperation with the French elsewhere in Africa could be offered in exchange for French commitments to go the course in the FTAI.

The United States could play an even more important role vis-a-vis the other countries whose cooperation can affect the outcome of the transition to independence. Our relationships with the Soviet Union, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia could be used to urge a positive response to French approaches, or to urge useful initiatives of their own independent of French suggestion. The Soviet Union's obvious contribution would be to restrain Somalia. Egypt and Saudi Arabia could contribute to restraining Somalia, through their common membership in the Arab League. Egypt and Saudi Arabia could also exert direct influence on FTAI leaders both to resist Somali pressures and to avoid antagonizing the Siad regime and providing pretexts for it to take hostile action.

United States influence could also be usefully brought to bear on Ethiopia. While we accept Ethiopia's professed lack of designs on the FTAI, we recognize that this is largely due to PMG expectations that a thoroughly pro-Ethiopian government will inherit French rule. We also recognize that preemptive Ethiopian action is possible should it appear that the territory may pass under Somali domination. While we could hardly object to Ethiopian action to resist Somali encroachments on the FTAI, we should, if it appears necessary, strongly discourage any

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PMG initiative which would provide a pretext for Somali offensive moves. Our ability to prevent PMG preemptive military action is strengthened by provisions in pertinent legislation for the cessation of security assistance programs if US-supplied arms are used for other than the designated purposes (self-defense and internal security), and for suspension of the programs while the matter is being investigated. Ethiopian cooperation of any kind with the US cannot be assured, moreover, in view of the present instability of the PMG and its recent sharp move leftward.

On another front we may be able to use our limited influence in Ethiopia to promote our interests. The substantial Ethiopian military establishment, over 40,000 strong, would ordinarily constitute an important deterrent to Somali armed action in the FTAI in view of the latter's numerical inferiority (see Tab 2). At this time, however, the FMG's forces are largely tied down combatting the Eritrean insurgency. A successful effort on our part to have this insurgency settled through negotiations would therefore contribute to preventing an outbreak of hostilities over the FTAI's independence, particularly if the French forces depart. However, this would seem to be a long shot at best in view of the bitter enmities existing in Eritrea and the present PMG plans for military and para-military

escalation cited in Part V; it would also require the US to depart from its previous non-involvement in Ethiopia's civil strife and from its policy of not tying our military assistance to any specific actions by the PMG.

As stated in Part VII, Saudi Arabia might be in position to play a special beneficial role because of the potential influence it is said to have on the FTAI's population through its position in Islam and its monetary resources*. These could conceivably be utilized to affect both the composition of the FTAI's new government and its conduct after the grant of independence. Whether or not the Saudi Arabian Government would be willing to become so fully involved remains to be seen, but the United States could at least use its special relationship with the Saudi leaders to point out that such a course could be beneficial to our mutual interests in the area. In addition we could also promote a tacit arrangement between Saudi Arabia and France whereby Saudi money would be used to promote the economic viability of the FTAI on condition that France assure its security by maintaining forces in Djibouti.

Although the possibility of an effective role by the OAU in the FTAI problem does not appear promising and any

*See footnote on page 44.

United States activity of any kind on the FTAI problem would have to be largely behind the scenes and closely coordinated with France. Too overt a US role or lack of French endorsement for our actions could cause the French to feel that we had assumed responsibility for settlement of the FTAI question and consequently to feel less of an obligation to play an active role, particularly with regard to the maintenance of French forces in Djibouti after independence.

For the same reasons any use of the American naval presence in the Middle East and the Indian Ocean to influence events in the FTAI should be only a measure of last resort and performed jointly with the French. The French will presumably be gratified to have our support, cooperation, and encouragement for their diplomatic and military moves. But they will not want to seem to be acting at American prompting, nor to see us try to mastermind events unilaterally or take charge overtly.

The options for the US in this situation consist

basically of varying degrees of American involvement in the overall problem, and in the selected areas of opportunity cited above. For discussion's sake we can identify two extreme degrees of involvement as "active" and "minimal" and examine the pros and cons of each, as applied to the overall problem and to each of its components. The options presented for the components of the problem are not mutually exclusive; several options could be combined to provide the most advantageous course for the USG to follow.

A. American Involvement in the Overall Problem

Active involvement would be a deliberate decision to use all appropriate means at our disposal to bring about a favorable result, taking care at the same time not to go so far as to make the other parties throw all responsibility for such an outcome on our shoulders. This restraint is crucial as continued French involvement, particularly the maintenance of its military in Djibouti, is vital for a peaceful solution. But within that limit we would bring all our influence to bear on the various actors to take the actions we thought best calculated to obtain a favorable outcome, offering quid pro quos and/or assistance where feasible.

Pros

-- This show of US interests could serve as a catalyst and bring about the best efforts of the French and the other actors to reach a satisfactory solution.

Cons

-- It could be interpreted by the parties concerned as implying greater commitment on our part than we intended.

-- It might be resented by the participants as untoward interference in a matter of primary interest to them, especially to the extent they perceived that our advice was gratuitous and unaccompanied by any material contribution.

-- It would involve US prestige, making us partially or wholly responsible for the results.

-- We would be expected to redress the situation if it went bad or to compensate the losers, i.e., Ethiopia.

Minimal involvement would relegate the USG to the role of a sideline well-wisher. We would make our views

known to the various actors but would not use any of our bargaining capital or offer assistance to press for the actions we considered desirable.

Pros

-- By deliverately minimizing US involvement at the start we would avoid any commitment to future action to redress the situation should things go badly.

Cons

-- Our role might be interpreted as a sign of unconcern and lessen efforts by the other parties involved to attain an acceptable solution.

-- Our passive role could encourage the Somalis, possibly aided by Cubans, to be bolder than they would otherwise be.

-- Our passive role would be read as a lack of US will to resist Communist advances in Africa, especially if the FTAI falls under Somali domination.

B. Coordination with the French

Active involvement would mean a continuing strategic and tactical dialogue with the French during which we would vigorously urge them to "hang tough" in Djibouti as a contribution to overall Western interests in the region. We could do so in the context of overall cooperation throughout Africa, citing our new interest in the continent manifested by the Secretary's trip, and holding out the prospect of US support for French positions elsewhere on the continent. A current act of support for France that could be used as an example of future cooperation is our continuing refusal to recognize the Comoros. Among other quid pro quos worth considering would be support for the French Indian Ocean fleet, if and when Diego Garcia is capable of providing it. We would also offer to support French initiatives toward other countries, coordinate our approaches, and jointly examine the best arguments and means to use to obtain the desired reactions.

Pros

-- Such a show of interest could well stiffen the French spine and increase their determination to remain in Djibouti militarily.

Cons

-- (These would be basically the same as the arguments against active involvement in the overall problem as listed above).

Minimal involvement would mean keeping our contacts with the French to a routine level, letting them know what we would like to see them do, but basically not trying to sway their decision.

Pros

-- This would minimize US involvement right at the start, avoiding any commitment and lessing any loss of US prestige should the situation turn out badly.

-- It would keep the main responsibility for handling this problem with the parties directly concerned.

Cons

-- It would make the French feel all alone in the face of the problem and increase the temptation for them to throw in their hand with only a token effort toward a respectable solution.

-- It would be read as US weakness elsewhere and

encourage Somali boldness.

C. Approaches to the Soviets

Active involvement would mean letting the Soviets know that we are seriously concerned with maintaining stability in the Horn of Africa and their willingness or lack of it to assist us, by judicious use of their influence over the Somalis, will be weighed in the balance of our overall relationship. We could promise for our part to work for a genuinely independent FTAI, not PMG or PRC dominated, in return for Soviet cooperation. A positive Soviet response could lead to wider-ranging talks dealing with our surrogate confrontation and the arms balance in the region.

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Pros

-- This could influence the Soviets into tightening the leash on their Somali clients.

Cons

-- It could be a distracting element in our relations with the USSR, taking attention away from more serious issues between us.

Minimal involvement would mean keeping our representations to the USSR at a pro forma level.

Pros

-- It would avoid overplaying a relatively minor element in our relationship with the Soviets.

Cons

-- The Soviets could read this as lack of US interest and consequently conclude that they need not risk disturbing their relations with the Somalis by restraining them on the FTAI.

D. Pressure on the Ethiopians

Active involvement with regard to Ethiopia is almost mandatory in view of our role as its military supplier. This would involve strong warnings against preemptive moves in the FTAI, backed by citation of the legislative sanctions applicable. It would also mean advising the PMG (and the Israeli Government) to terminate the Israeli advisory effort in Ethiopia as a needless irritant to the

Arabs at a time when their assistance would be salutary. Other approaches to the PMG would be aimed at stopping the anti-Arab media campaign, promoting negotiations on Eritrea in order to free more Ethiopian forces to act as a deterrent to Somalia, and encouraging the PMG to accept a genuinely independent, not pro-Ethiopian, FTAI regime. We would use the bargaining leverage provided by our security assistance and our willingness to support Ethiopia's interest in the FTAI to push our views. In spite of these assets our ability to influence the PMG may turn out to be extremely limited in view of its instability and increasingly strident extremism.

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Pros

-- Visible involvement with Ethiopia on this question would balance our active role elsewhere and hopefully make our approaches to other countries more effective.

-- We will be held partly responsible for Ethiopia's actions anyway, since our role as arms supplier supposedly provides us with great influence over the PMG.

-- Our relations with the PMG have been characterized by bluntness, and strong advice on our part would not be

particularly resented.

Cons

-- In spite of the supposed leverage provided by our military assistance, the PMG may well disregard our advice, particularly regarding its handling of the Eritrean problem.

-- It would be a change from our present policy of not using the leverage of our military assistance to try to influence PMG actions.

Minimal involvement would mean continuing our present style of relationship with the PMG, in which we do not try to use the leverage provided by our security assistance and our dealings with the PMG, although blunt, are confined to bilateral issues and the PMG's performance in international forums. We would still proffer advice on PMG actions with regard to the FTAI problem but would not apply any pressure. We would still be obliged to make strong warnings concerning the possible consequences of unprovoked preemptive Ethiopian military action in the FTAI.

Pros

-- It would avoid further strains on our relationship with the PMG.

Cons

-- The PMG could interpret our attitude as permissive with regard to the FTAI.

-- This apparent green light to the PMG would increase Somali fears of PMG action on the FTAI and make the Siad regime all the more ready to push its interests by violent means.

-- Our unwillingness to take a strong line with our own "client state" would weaken the effectiveness of our approaches to other countries.

E. Enlistment of Moderate Arab Assistance

Active involvement would mean making a strong appeal to the Egyptians and particularly to the Saudis to use their influence on the Somalis and the Arab League and their potential influence on the FTAI's population to bring about a desirable result. We would urge the adoption of strong

guarantees by the League and use of Saudi resources to influence Afar and Issa leaders in the FTAI to work for a genuinely independent FTAI and not let themselves be intimidated by Somali pressure or threats. The Saudis would also be encouraged to offer financial support to the future state as a tacit quid pro quo for the maintenance of French forces. We would make this issue an important aspect of our bilateral relationships with the two countries, offering our assistance and tactical advice wherever appropriate.

Pros

-- Our visible involvement could spur the two countries into an active and productive role in the evolution of the FTAI.

Cons

-- The Saudis and Arabs might not be willing to become that actively involved, particularly at US prompting, and a hard line approach would merely disturb our relations without producing any benefits.

-- The countries in question could resent US involvement in a problem which they probably understand better than we.

Minimal involvement would have us merely telling the Egyptians and Saudis that we considered a genuinely independent FTAI to be in the common interest of all of us and that we hoped that they could use their undoubted influence in the area to help bring this result about and restrain Somali ambitions. We would offer no specific advice, apply no pressure, nor make their performance a significant factor in our relationship.

Pros

-- This would avoid disturbing our relationships with these countries by putting them on the spot.

Cons

-- They might interpret these pro forma approaches as indications of US lack of interest and therefore reduce their own involvement, fatalistically accepting an unfavorable outcome for the FTAI.

F. Encouragement of the OAU and the UN

Active involvement would mean that the United States would overtly favor and lobby with our African friends for an active OAU role. While we do not expect that the

OAU can do much to deter Somalia, we would urge it to provide the desired guarantees and possibly commit itself to some type of involvement, such as the provision of technical assistance and civil servants. In the case of the UN, we would strongly support approaches by the French or any of the other actors aimed at having the UN play a peacekeeping role either by mediation or the provision of peacekeeping forces.

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Pros

-- This would demonstrate to the OAU that we are truly interested in the future and welfare of Africa.

-- It would demonstrate our support of the OAU and our belief that Africans should solve African problems.

-- A UN role might be the last resort between war and peace in the Horn.

Cons

-- The OAU might resent our gratuitous approach.

-- Overactive US involvement in eventual UN consideration of the issue could merely mobilize the non-aligned against us.

Minimal involvement would mean letting the Africans and the principal actors carry the ball in both the OAU and the UN, confining ourselves to good wishes for the OAU's efforts and to voting our preferences on resolutions and actions brought up before the UN.

Pros

-- This would help keep the problem a regional or African one and minimize the East-West confrontation aspect of it.

-- It would avoid mobilizing the non-aligned against the UN actions we favored.

Cons

-- It could contribute to a minimal and ineffective OAU role in the subject and delay any UN participation.

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